

# Blessed Are The Pure in Heart

## The Beatitudes (part 7)

*Summary:* Yes, we can be pure in heart and, yes, we can see God, but not in the way we might hope. Only in the way of the Beatitudes, but that is a narrow gate and a difficult road (Mt 7:4). Are you prepared to walk it?

*Scriptures:* Matthew 5:3–16; Psalm 24

*Date:* Sunday, 19 March 2023 (NarellanCong)

### Introduction

#### Forrest Gump Harangued by Drill Sergeant

In an hilarious scene from the 1994 American comedy-drama film, *Forrest Gump*, the main character is harangued by his drill sergeant:

Compared to his fellow soldier-recruits, Forrest has been singularly focused on the task at hand and completes the assembly of his rifle, announcing, “Done, Drill Sergeant!”

The Drill Sergeant rushes up to Forrest and asks, “Why did you put that weapon together so quickly, Gump?”

Forrest meekly replies, “You told me to, Drill Sergeant.”

As a cultural icon, the character Forrest Gump would be considered as ‘pure in heart’. Gump is a character in whom there is no malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, or slander (1 Pe 2:1). He has no personal agenda nor aggression toward others. Gump protects those he loves and weeps at their deaths. He keeps his promises.

In Gump’s own words, “I may not be a smart man, but I know what love is”, and no one would have any reason to challenge him on that assertion.

For all his virtues, Gump is not the ideal human of Nietzschean philosophy, the *Übermensch* I described in part 4 of this series.<sup>1</sup> He is also not the ideal human of Christian faith and lifestyle —although you might have thought that was why I was using him as an illustration.

The fictional character of Forrest Gump is more like the ideal human of Buddhism, for he has no ego, no will; he is passive, he does not react for his own preservation, nor defend his property or possessions. Gump does not suffer because he has no attachments —although, in this regard he is not a ‘perfect’ Buddhist because he does grieve the loss of people he loves, thereby revealing some attachments.

If Forrest Gump is what most of us would call ‘pure in heart’, then it is no wonder we misunderstand the seventh beatitude of Jesus found in *The Gospel of Matthew*, chapter 5.<sup>2</sup>

#### What & Why?

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. (Matthew 5:8)

This beatitude seems so innocent and, dare I say, ‘pure’, and its promise is a pearl to be sought, a true treasure to behold. In our fallenness and sinful arrogance we might even think ourselves worthy, sometimes.

Yes, we can be pure in heart and, yes, we can see God, but not in the way we might hope. Only in the way of the Beatitudes, but that is a narrow gate and a difficult road (Mt 7:4). Are you prepared to walk it?

## Explanation

### What is a “Pure Heart”?

Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not appealed to what is false, and who has not sworn deceitfully. (Psalm 24:3–4)

We are reminded in Psalm 24 that “clean hands and a pure heart” are required of persons who dare to approach the presence of God in his Temple.

Examples are the prophet Isaiah who, in a vision, was cleansed by a coal from the altar (Isa 6:1-7). Another is when the Lord appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai. He instructed the people to consecrate themselves by washing their clothes before he appeared in a cloud covering the mountain so that they would hear his voice (Ex 19:9-11).

We learn from the context this psalm the “heart” represents more than the force of emotions. It refers to one’s innermost being, that which shapes a person’s life.

“Purity” here means singleness of motive and devotion, as opposed to a divided motive.<sup>3</sup>

An illustration of the penalty of having a divided motive is seen in The Mandalorian television series, where the main character cannot wield the Darksaber because it gets increasingly heavier in his hands as he resists its subconscious connection with him. He is fighting against it more than with it.

Anyone can hold the Darksaber. The trick is keeping it, along with your head. (Ursa Wren to Sabine Wren, “Legacy of Mandalore”, *Star Wars Rebels*, season 3, episode 16)

Bo-Katan Kryze, on the other hand, can wield it with efficiency and destruction, for she is singleminded in her focus on retaking the throne of Mandalore—but I digress.

Back to the psalm: The purity the psalmist referred to is focussed devotion to God and does not mean moral perfection or sexual purity.

Combined with the heart as a symbol of one’s mind or thoughts, the psalmist has described how a soul concerned solely with pleasing God is required to come into his presence.

For example, an intent to please God is applicable to one’s attitude toward people of the opposite sex:

But I tell you, everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:28)

You can keep your mind focussed on the will of God or be distracted by the attractiveness of the opposite sex.

Purity of heart applies also to money:

But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don't break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:20–21)

Treasure in Heaven comes from devotion to God.

Purity of heart even applies to one's own words:

But let your 'yes' mean 'yes,' and your 'no' mean 'no.' Anything more than this is from the evil one. (Matthew 5:37)

Saying what you mean, and meaning truth and commitment, reveals a singular focus in our words.

The pure in heart then are those who serve God loyally for his own sake and not primarily out of self-interest, for as a psalmist prayed,

Teach me your way, LORD, and I will live by your truth. Give me an undivided mind to fear your name. (Psalm 86:11)

Moses similarly encouraged the people,

“Listen, Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. (Deuteronomy 6:4–5)

What does this devotion to God look like in real life? The apostle Paul described his own heart in this way:

Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13–14)

When Mary broke protocol and sat at the feet of Jesus, her sister Martha complained, to which Jesus responded:

The Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has made the right choice, and it will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:41–42)<sup>4</sup>

Both the apostle and Mary, in their own ways, revealed their devotion to god to most important. Other aspects of their lives were adjusted to fall in line with a commitment to God's will and commands.

The opposite of the pure heart is the divided mind:

“No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. (Matthew 6:24)

Yet the brother of Jesus encouraged his readers to change their mind:

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. (James 4:8)

Even the first disciples struggled with divided minds:

[When Jesus helped Peter back into the boat] Then those in the boat worshipped him and said, “Truly you are the Son of God.” (Matthew 14:33)

When [the disciples] saw [the resurrected Jesus], they worshiped, but some doubted. (Matthew 28:17)

Not surprisingly, Jesus called out religious leaders of his time for hiding their divided minds in outward piety:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. (Matthew 23:25)

To be pure in heart is to be undivided in our devotion to God, the Almighty, the Father, our creator. To dedicate all we think, say and do for his glory and toward his purposes.

### **A Tall Order**

To be pure in heart seems like a tall order, an impossible demand. Why then seek to be pure in heart?

The promised benefit is **the pure in heart will see God**, a gift which seems impossible for humans to experience in this life. But is it?

While I am not a Fundamentalist, I do take the scriptures at their word. If Jesus promised the pure in heart will see God, then I believe he meant it. What Jesus meant by “see God” is something we can only work out by exploring the examples found in the Bible of encounters with God.

Moses “saw” God (Ex 33:18–23), as did Isaiah (Isa 6:1–8):

Then Moses said, “Please, let me see your glory.” He said, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you ... you will see my back, but my face will not be seen.” (Exodus 33:18–23)

Job “saw” God (Job 19:26; 38:1), or at least heard him, as did Abraham (Gen 12:1; 15:17–21):

Even after my skin has been destroyed, yet I will see God in my flesh. (Job 19:26)

Then the LORD answered Job from the whirlwind. (Job 38:1)

Jesus stated we can “see” the effects of the Holy Spirit like wind:

The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” (John 3:8)

The psalmist argued we can “see” the mighty acts of God (Ps 66:5; cf. 34:8):

Come and see the wonders of God; his acts for humanity are awe-inspiring. (Psalm 66:5)

Taste and see that the LORD is good. How happy is the person who takes refuge in him! (Psalm 34:8)

Jesus told Philip,

If you know me, you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him ... The one who has seen me has seen the Father... (John 14:7–9)

When we read in the scriptures the claims Jesus made about himself and the record of all he did, then we “see” him, and in seeing him, we see the Father.

The Triune God is not an abstract idea but a living being in three persons. If we can know this being, and be known by this being, as a full-fledged person, then we can “see” this being, or at least the effects of this being’s activity in the world and in our own life.

Does anyone know what I am talking about? Has anyone had such an experience? Does this description of seeing God not sound sexy for anyone?

Like the first disciples and all atheist detractors, we want to see God fully and completely now, but we all know we will settle for less. Let me prove it to you.

There are people who will swoon or scream if their favourite celebrity even looks in their direction.

There are people who will pay good money for a strand or two of their favourite celebrity’s hair rescued from the bottom of a hotel shower stall. Gross!

There is a funny story of a signature collector who wrote a letter to Steve Jobs asking for his autograph. To which Jobs sent a letter stating, in no uncertain terms, he does not provide autographs to fans. However, he did sign the letter, so that counts as an autograph, doesn’t it? ☺

Even spiritual pilgrims have been known to travel far, and pay exorbitant amounts, for an alleged piece of Jesus’ cross. If we were to collect all those ‘pieces’ and put them together, I am certain they would amount to more than one complete cross.

None of these examples represent any meaningful contact or relationship between a fan and a celebrity. Yet people will do just about anything for even the smallest or most insignificant regard from their favourite celebrities. What kind of encounter with God will be enough to satisfy you?

Our Heavenly Father cares for his children, the friends of Jesus, and actually wants to be known by us. If we do not see the positive impact of his presence all around us, then whose fault is that, His or ours?

If our eyes and ears are open (Mt 13:16-17), then we will “see” God and “know” him just as surely as we know anyone.

Some Christians argue this promise to see God is really only available in the coming age. Of course, that is when we will fully and finally see him, but I believe the pure in heart can see him now, at least in some small way which will be enough to know he is real and really does care for and is concerned about us! The scriptures testify to this, as does human experience.

## Application

### Who Then Can See God?

If the first disciples were not entirely sure they had seen the Almighty God in and through Jesus, how then can we ourselves become pure in heart and see God?

The answer is the Way of the Beatitudes!

The Beatitudes are a *loose progression*, by that I mean they are steps in a journey of faith. Do we walk these steps one at a time or one after another? That is between the individual and God.

It is the Holy Spirit who convicts of sin, judgement and righteousness, and leads us into all truth (Jn 16:7-13a). The friends of Jesus are merely witnesses to the good news about Jesus, which hopefully encourages others to allow the Holy Spirit to do his work in a person's heart and mind and life.

Treating them as if they are a progression is helpful for understanding the Beatitudes.

First, one recognises his emptiness and pledges allegiance to the Kingdom of God —that is what it means to be “poor in spirit” (Mt 5:3).

Next, one experiences grief over sin and receives comfort through forgiveness —that is what it means to mourn (Mt 5:4).

Then, one rejects his or her self-centredness before God and begins to glimpse the fulfilment of God's Promises and Plan —that is to become humble (Mt 5:5).

Fourth, one desperately yearns for his own perpetual peace with God and is satisfied —that is to hunger and thirst for righteousness (Mt 5:6).

Having been satisfied, one overflows with a desire to help others enter that same peace with our Creator —that is to be a peacemaker (Mt 5:9).

At peace with God, you are “saved” (Rom 10:13), “born again” (Jn 3:3), you have become a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17), but that is not the end of the matter. Now you have your whole life to live and be transformed by the Holy Spirit into the likeness of Christ Jesus (Rom 12:1-2; 1Co 15:49; Php 3:21; Col 3:10; 1Jn 3:2), to do the works he did and would do (Jn 14:12) —that is what is meant by “pure in heart” (Mt 5:8). The Holy Spirit can and will transform our heart and mind and will to conform with the good, pleasing and perfect will of God the Father (Rom 12:2), which is far better than we can imagine for ourselves or achieve by ourselves.

## Conclusion

We are now on the seventh part of this sermon series and have looked, perhaps, more closely at the Beatitudes than we ever have.

Before we get to the final Beatitude next week, the conclusion of the matter today can only be for me to ask you: Do you want to see God? Do you want to know God is real? Do you want to experience him in your life?

If you do not believe, so are looking for proof, then I fear your heart may be too hard, as was the Pharaoh's heart who let his own people suffer because he would not acknowledge the Almighty God and his messenger, Moses.

But if recognise your spiritual emptiness; if you grieve over your sin and the sin which tears our families, friends and neighbours apart; if you reject your self-centredness and the corruption of your soul; if you desperately yearn for that peace which seems so elusive; then, you need to know God loves you and has done what needed to be done to reconcile you with him, our gracious and merciful Creator.

Turn away from the human condition, with its corruption, and turn toward the good, pleasing and perfect will of God. Become a friend of Jesus, for then yours will be the free, full and forever life promised. The Beatitudes describe the mental, emotional and spiritual steps we take on our journey toward the One who loves and accepts you unconditionally. It is a narrow gate and a difficult road that is the Way of the Beatitudes. Are you prepared to walk it?

If so, the Prayer Team will remain after the service to pray with you, that the Holy Spirit would come into your life and complete the work of conviction and guide you into the truth we all seek.

For now, let us sing together a prayerful rendition of a classic song, which gives voice to our desire to have God abide with us through all the circumstances of our life. We have nothing to fear if we walk with Him and He with us.

## Endnotes

- 1 Ian Forest-Jones, "Blessed Are The Humble: The Beatitudes (part 4)", *Narellan Community Congregational Church*, 26-Feb-2023, <https://narellancong.org.au/teaching/beatitudes-part-4/>.
- 2 Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are taken from *The Christian Standard Bible* (Nashville, TN, USA: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
- 3 Cf. Jb 22:30; Ps 73:1; Mt 5:8; 2Kg 1:2–3.
- 4 "According to commentator, R. Alan Culpepper, there is a conjunction of three words or phrases in these verses: 'leaving' (πορεύομαι poreuomai), 'the word of God' (τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ ton logon tou theou), 'to serve' (διακονέω diakoneō). These will be found again in Acts 6:1–6, where the disciples choose not to leave the ministry of the Word of God to serve tables and instead appoint the seven for this task. This scene with the apostles then parallels this one with Mary and Martha, in which Jesus allows Mary —a woman— to claim the same role that the disciples later claim for themselves." —R. Alan Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke", *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 9 (Nashville, TN, USA: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), pg 231–232.